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Research Report

Newspaper Readership Project

Newspaper Advertising Bureau, Inc. 485 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017

READERS RATE THEIR

DAILY NEWSPAPER

Measuring Images and Performance

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NATIONAL STUDY OF THE DAILY NEWSPAPER AND ITS AUDIENCES

PREFACE

This report presents detailed findings from a comprehensive survey of public attitudes toward the daily newspaper. The study collected information on a wide range of topics, e.g., newspaper reading and television viewing in three day parts, readers' content preferences and ratings of the daily press, circulation and home delivery, and demographic data on the survey's respondents. The field work for the survey, conducted in May 1982 by Audits & Surveys, Inc., was carried out by means of personal in-home interviews with 1,979 adults age 18 and over in a national probability sample of American households.

The results of this survey have been presented in a series of companion reports, including "Circulation and Home Delivery Patterns," "Newspaper Pages, Ads, and Readers," "Meeting Readers' Multiple Needs," "How Do Your Papers Rate With Readers," and "Newspapers in American News Habits." These reports and a separate technical report on the study, containing copies of the questionnaires, are available from NAB.

The study was one of a series of research studies conducted under the auspices of the Newspaper Readership Project (1977-83), an industry-wide effort to promote circulation and readership. This report was written by Albert E. Gollin and Michael L. Macht, with the assistance of Raul Batista of NAB's Research Department.

CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
HIGHLIGHTS	ix
SECTION ONE - THE DAILY PAPER AS AN INFORMATION SOURCE	1
What Kind of Content Do Readers Want in Their Paper?	1
How Valuable Is the Paper's Content?	4
How Balanced Is The Paper's Content Coverage?	6
Does Newspaper Size Affect Attitudes Toward the Paper's Content?	8
How Would Readers Change Their Paper?	9
SECTION TWO - READERS' FEELINGS OF ATTACHMENT TO THE NEWSPAPER	17
How Close Are Readers to the Newspaper?	17
How Much Do Readers Rely on the Newspaper?	20
How Strongly do Readers Identify with the Writers and Columnists They Regularly Follow in the Paper?	24
SECTION THREE - READERS' RATINGS OF THEIR PAPER'S EDITORIAL POLICY	29
How Do Readers Rate Their Paper's Political Views?	29
Do Readers Agree with Their Paper's Editorial Views?	31
Is the Paper's Editorial Section Varied in Its Content?	32
How Unbiased is the Paper's Coverage of the News?	34
How Involved Are Readers with the Editorial Section of Their Paper?	37
SECTION FOUR - DIMENSIONS OF NEWSPAPER PERFORMANCE	45
How Well Does the Newspaper Cover the News?	45
Readers' Ratings of Key Aspects of Their Newspaper's Performance.	47
How Do Readers Rate Their Current Paper in a Comparative Context?	49
How Much Power Does the Newspaper Have to Affect People's Lives?	53
APPENDIX	61

LIST OF TABLES

		Page
1	Newspaper Content Orientations	3
2	Perceived Value of Newspaper Content on Most Days	5
3	Satisfaction with the Daily Newspaper as a Source of Personally Important Information	7
4	Perceptions of Content Imbalances of Paper Read Most Often	9
5	Preference for a Thicker or Thinner Paper	11
6.1	Perceived Value of Newspaper Content on Most Days by Newspaper Size	12
6.2	Satisfaction with the Daily Newspaper as a Source of Personally Important Information by Newspaper Size	12
7	Type of Content Want to Be Added	14
8	Type of Content Want Reduced or Eliminated	14
9	Which Medium Do They Feel Closest To?	19
10	How Would You Feel If It Were Impossible To Read a Paper/Watch TV News for Some Time?	21
11	Changes in Media Attachment: 1982 vs. 1961	23
12	Readers' Identification With Newspaper Writers/Columnists	25
13	Medium Feel Closest to by Identification with Newspaper Writers/ Columnists	27
14	Attachment to Media by Identification with Newspaper Writers/ Columnists	27
15	Perceived Political Views of Newspaper and TV News Among Demographic Groups	30
16	Extent of Agreement with the Newspaper's Editorial Viewpoint	33
17	Perceived Variety in Newspaper's Editorial Section	35
18	Perceived Editorial Effects on News Coverage	36
19	Frequency of Reading Editorials	38
20	Writing a Letter to the Editor	41

		Page
21	Perceived Bias in News Coverage by Frequency of Reading Editorials	42
22	Extent of Agreement With Newspaper's Editorial Viewpoint By Frequency of Reading Editorials	43
23	Readers' Evaluations of Newspaper's Coverage of Various News Topics	46
24	Proportion of Readers Who Feel Their Paper Does a "Very Good" Job of Covering News Topics	48
25	Readers' Evaluations of Selected Aspects of Their Newspaper's Performance	50
26	Proportion of Readers Reporting a High Score ("7" or More) on Selected Aspects of Newspaper Performance	51
27	Changes in Newspaper Read Most Often	52
28	Current Paper Compared to Paper Read Earlier	54
29	Current Paper Now Compared to Five Years Ago	55
30	Readers' Evaluations of the Power of Nine Institutions	58
31	Readers' Evaluations of the Power of the Local Newspaper and Local TV Station	59
A-1	Bases for Sampled Adults - Versions A & B - Unweighted	63
A-2	Bases for Sampled Adults - Versions A & B - Weighted (in 000's)	65

HIGHLIGHTS

A nationwide survey of American adults' attitudes toward their daily newspaper (and other mass media), conducted by Audits & Surveys, Inc. in May 1982, revealed the following:

1. Readers in almost all demographic groups express a preference for news (vs. features) in their daily paper. Only among the youngest readers is this general preference reversed. The desire for more news is closely linked with levels of education: the better-educated typically show stronger news orientations than those with less education.

2. The daily paper occupies a central place in the information-gathering activities of its readers. For more than two-thirds (69%) on most days it contains content that is "very important" to them. Similarly, for more than three-quarters (77%), it satisfies their need for "most of the information...on things that really matter" to them. Those who are frequent readers are significantly more affirmative in their attitudes on this dimension of newspaper satisfaction than are infrequent readers.

3. Readers vary in their perceptions of imbalances in newspaper content that tend to favor different groups in the reading public. Majorities agree that their daily paper strikes a reasonable balance in meeting the interests of readers of all types. But <u>older</u> readers are favored over younger ones in the opinions of 36%; <u>men's</u> interests get greater attention in the opinions of 13%; and the concerns of the <u>better educated</u> are better served in the view of 30%. Black readers are somewhat more critical on all three counts than are whites.

4. Most readers (73%) are satisfied with the size of their current daily paper. Of those (15%) who wish it to be thicker, it is (overlapping) readers of rural or small town papers and those whose paper typically is thin (less than 40 pages, excluding classified) who stand out. Conversely, among those (12%) who want a thinner paper, it is readers of the biggest papers who express a desire for less. But the actual size of the paper is <u>not</u> correlated with expressions of satisfaction with the quality or personal importance of the content of their daily paper. If anything, the more readers are offered, the better are the ratings they give on these dimensions of newspaper performance.

5. Readers express varying degrees of attachment to their daily paper, compared with TV or radio. Overall, TV is the one rated "closest" by the largest proportion (40%), with newspapers second (28%). But the paper they read most often is <u>first</u> in the affections of its most faithful adherents: the college-educated, the upper income group, and those who read it daily. The strong appeal of TV to the young is clearly displayed in these findings.

6. The irreplaceability of the newspaper or of TV news in the daily lives of readers was tested, with similar results for both news media. About one-third would "feel lost" without either, and 21-23% could easily do without them. The rest said they would miss them but could get used to their loss. Comparing these results with ones obtained two decades ago, the hold that newspapers have on readers' affections in this sense appears to have weakened.

7. Attachment to the daily paper is fostered by identification with a favorite writer or columnist. Only 41% of readers were able to mention a specific writer by name; almost three-quarters felt they knew what that writer was like or wanted him/her as a friend. These personal attachments can help build or retain reader loyalty, affecting the sense of the paper's centrality in their daily lives.

8. Readers typically see their paper's political alignment as middle-of-the-road (40%) or conservative (24%) rather than as liberal (16%). TV news programs viewed by them get ratings that are tilted somewhat more toward the liberal part of the political spectrum. Blacks are likelier to rate their papers and TV news programs as liberal more often than whites do.

9. Agreement with the editorial viewpoints expressed by their daily paper is widespread among all reader groups. But substantial minorities see their paper's news coverage as influenced (at least occasionally) by its editorial slant. Typically, those who read the editorial pages regularly are among the paper's most loyal readers, yet they are not more likely than the more casual scanners of editorial page offerings to see the news as isolated from editorial influence or bias.

10. Ratings of the newspaper's performance vary with the type of content assessed. Sports, crime, and inflation coverage are rated highly; conversely, coverage of the more complex topics of pollution, health care, and youthful drug use (as well as neighborhood news) get the lowest ratings. Typically, black readers give their paper's coverage higher ratings on these measures than do whites.

11. Papers get consistently high ratings on eight of nine general aspects of performance: readability, quality of its staff, value for the money, the watchdog role, etc. Only with respect to "how fair or impartial" it is does a minority give their paper a "high" ratings. Better-educated readers are more critical on these measures; frequent readers are generally less critical.

12. Newspapers being read now are rated higher in quality than papers read at some earlier time, or than the same paper five years prior to the survey. Very few readers gave comparative ratings that placed the quality of their paper in a poorer light.

13. The local daily paper, when compared with agencies of government or national economic forces, is seen as having a less potent effect on the lives or well-being of its readers. Local churches, TV stations, and daily papers are at the bottom end of the scale of perceived influence (relative to government) by almost all groups of readers.

SECTION I

THE DAILY PAPER AS AN INFORMATION SOURCE

The daily newspaper represents a potentially rich source of important or personally relevant information because of the volume and variety of topics it covers. A newspaper's ability to attract and retain readers largely depends on how it serves as a source of information for individuals with widely varying interests. A key component of readers' overall assessments of their daily paper, therefore, is their attitudes toward the news and information conveyed to them. The questions analyzed in this section were designed to elicit information about readers' content preferences, their rating of the paper as an information source, their perceptions of any biases in the paper's content, and their attitudes towards the size of their paper. The section concludes with a review of readers' suggestions for adding or cutting back on content of various types.

What Kind of Content Do Readers Want in Their Paper?

As an initial step toward understanding readers' ratings of the paper as an information source, readers were asked to respond to two questions designed to assess their content preferences. In one, they were asked to indicate which of two kinds of content (news or features) they look forward to more in their paper; in the other, they were asked to indicate the kind of content they would want to see covered in a hypothetical, "ideal" newspaper. Each question was asked of one-half of the total sample, who were interviewed using either of two versions (A and B) of the basic questionnaire.

Table 1 displays the major findings obtained from both questions. As can be seen, more readers look forward to news items in the paper than they do to standing features (59% to 40%). However, and not surprisingly, readers' content preferences are strongly related to certain demographic characteristics as well as life-style factors. For example, the preference for news is quite strong among male readers; contrastingly, women show only a slightly greater preference for features. Readers' content preferences are also significantly shaped by their level of education. The preference for news is strongest among better-educated readers. Finally, a stated preference for news or features is heavily dependent upon one's age. In fact, unique among all reader groups, the youngest readers (18-24 years) look forward to regular features in the paper more than they do to the news.

When asked to choose between two hypothetical papers -- one that emphasizes news coverage, the other containing mainly features -- readers' preferences for an ideal paper generally mirror their content preferences. As shown in table 1, more readers (49%) prefer a paper that is mainly devoted to the news than one that is devoted to features (20%). Again, this pattern holds for all major subgroups with the exception of the youngest readers, who expressed a clear preference for a paper mainly devoted to features.

It is important to emphasize, however, that while two-thirds of readers indicated a preference for either news or features, the second largest absolute proportion of readers (26%) volunteered a response that their ideal paper would be one that strikes a balance between news and features.

Table 1

Newspaper Content Orientations

	Version A: Readers Who Look Forward More To		Version B: Readers Who Prefer a Paper That Is Mostly*	
	News	Features	News	Features
Total readers[1]	59%	40%	49%	20%
By age				
18 - 24	42	57	30	41
25 - 29	59	41	50	22
30 - 34	58	42	56	18
35 - 44	64	36	49	17
45 - 54	68	28	50	14
55 - 64	62	37	55	16
65 +	61	37	58	9
By sex				
Men	72	27	57	17
Women	47	51	43	23
By race				
White	59	40	49	20
Black	54	42	49	13
By education				
College graduate +	71	27	68	12
Some college	60	40	52	27
High school graduate	54	45	40	24
Less than high school	55	42	47	12
By income				
$35,000 +	59	40	63	20
$25 - 35,000	57	42	46	24
$15 - 25,000	60	38	46	20
$10 - 15,000	61	38	43	17
Less than $10,000	63	35	48	24
By city size				
1 million +	56	43	55	15
250 - 999,999	59	40	44	22
50 - 249,999	62	36	45	25
Non-metro area	60	39	46	23
By reading frequency[2]				
Frequent readers	60	40	53	17
Infrequent readers	55	41	41	26

[1] In this and succeeding tables, those who report that they never read a daily or Sunday newspaper (10% of the total sample) are excluded.

[2] Frequent reader = read 4 or 5 in past 5 weekdays.
Infrequent readers = read 3 or fewer in past 5 weekdays.

* The residual percentage is comprised mainly (26%) of those who volunteered a preference for "a balance of both."

"As you know, most newspaper readers look through both the news items and also some of the regular features--such as columnists, editorials, comics, reviews of movies and book, and other features. Which one of these statements comes closest to describing your own feelings?" [I look forward more to reading ...]

Suppose that there were two newspapers around here: one that was mostly news with some features, and the other that was mostly entertaining features with a summary of news. Which newspaper would you personally prefer?"

How Valuable Is the Paper's Content?

People will develop stronger reading habits if they find their daily paper to be a reliable source of personally relevant information. To determine how readers rate their newspaper as a dependable source of daily information, respondents were asked two related questions. One asked them to rate the personal value of the information they normally find in the paper. The other asked respondents to rate how adequately the daily paper met their needs for personally relevant information: whether they get such information mostly from the paper or whether they have to go elsewhere for it.

As shown in Table 2, a large majority of readers (69%) indicate that on most days, there are things in the paper that are personally relevant (i.e., very important) to them. Readers' responses to this question are significantly related to their frequency of reading. Compared with infrequent readers, the three in five (62%) who are frequent readers are much more likely to find personally relevant information in the paper on most days.

Consistent with this finding, readers' ratings of the value of their newspaper's content are linked with demographic factors that are in turn closely related to frequency of reading. For example, a substantially greater proportion of college graduates (who also tend to be frequent newspaper readers) find personally relevant information in the paper than do readers with less education (who are more likely to be infrequent readers). This same trend can be observed with respect to income: a significantly greater proportion of high income readers find the paper's content to be personally valuable than do low income readers.

Table 2

Perceived Value of Newspaper Content On Most Days

	Content very Important to me	Content hardly makes much difference
Total readers (Version A)	69%	30%
By age		
18 - 24	66	34
25 - 29	66	34
30 - 34	75	25
35 - 44	74	24
45 - 54	67	30
55 - 64	73	27
65 +	64	35
By sex		
Men	73	26
Women	65	34
By race		
White	69	31
Black	76	22
By education		
College graduate	80	18
1-3 years college	68	32
High school graduate	69	30
Less than high school	60	39
By household income		
$35,000 & over	79	21
$25,000 - 35,000	72	27
$15,000 - 25,000	73	27
$10,000 - 15,000	64	36
Less than $10,000	69	30
By city size		
1 million +	73	26
250 - 999,999	68	31
50 - 249,999	71	29
Non-metro area	64	36
By reading frequency		
Frequent readers	76	23
Infrequent readers	52	47

Q.: "Which of these two statements comes closest to the way you feel?
On most days there are things in the paper that are very important to me, or
On most days hardly anything in the paper makes much difference."

Readers were asked to rate how adequately the newspaper met their information needs. As shown in table 3, two principal findings emerged from their responses. First, an overwhelming majority of readers rate their paper positively in this regard. Over three quarters (77%) indicate that the daily paper provides most of the information they want about things that really matter to them. And, consistent with other findings, a substantially greater proportion of frequent readers than infrequent readers (84% vs. 58%) attest to their satisfaction with the daily paper in these terms. This suggests that the latter group might be persuaded to increase their reading frequency by content changes that augment the paper's value in this basic way.

How Balanced Is The Paper's Content Coverage?

Even if readers rate their paper favorably as an information source they may not be satisfied with its coverage of topics that are of special importance to groups or segments to which they belong. A highly educated person who is personally satisfied with information provided by his paper might be less satisfied with the paper's treatment of certain topics that do not seem up to the standard expected by highly educated people in general. Or, women might feel that the paper's coverage is disproportionately oriented to topics that appeal more to men. In the present study, this question was addressed by requiring respondents to rate their paper in terms of several potential imbalances in content coverage. They were asked to indicate whether they felt that their paper's coverage was tilted more toward (or away from) the interests of several demographic groups: older or younger, men or women, better-educated or the less well-educated.

Table 3

Satisfaction with the Daily Newspaper As A Source of Personally Important Information

	Paper has things that matter	Have to go elsewhere
Total readers (Version A)	77%	22%
By age		
18 - 24	72	26
25 - 29	73	26
30 - 34	78	22
35 - 44	73	25
45 - 54	79	20
55 - 64	79	19
65 +	83	17
By sex		
Men	76	24
Women	77	21
By race		
White	76	23
Black	81	17
By education		
College graduate	69	30
1-3 years college	74	26
High school graduate	82	17
Less than high school	76	24
By household income		
$35,000 & over	70	30
$25,000 - 35,000	84	15
$15,000 - 25,000	78	21
$10,000 - 15,000	80	19
Less than $10,000	72	27
By city size		
1 million	80	19
250 - 999,999	74	26
50 - 249,999	71	28
Non-metro area	77	21
By reading frequency		
Frequent readers	84	15
Infrequent readers	58	40

Q.: "Different people want different kinds of information.
Which of these two statements comes closest to the way you feel?
The daily newspaper gives me most of the information I want about the things that really matter to me, or
I have to go elsewhere to get the information I want about the things that really matter to me."

A majority of readers feel that the content of their daily paper is reasonably well balanced (i.e., unbiased) with respect to interests of major demographic groups: 59% of all readers feel that their paper is unbiased with respect to age; 81% feel that their paper is balanced with respect to sex; and 64% feel that the paper is balanced with respect to educational level. As table 4 shows, there is comparatively little sense of resentment in the aggregate responses of different reader groups, e.g., women who feel the paper's coverage favors men's interests, or the less educated who feel the paper's coverage tilts toward the needs of better educated people. But substantial minorities among all demographic groups see their paper's content coverage as favoring older people, the better educated, and (in lesser measure) men.

Does Newspaper Size Affect Attitudes Toward the Paper's Content?

It is reasonable to expect that readers' overall ratings of their paper may be influenced, at least in part, by its size. For example, it has been suggested that some readers of large metropolitan area newspapers may be turned off by their paper's bulk, since when faced with an overly thick newspaper, they may feel unable to cope with so much printed matter. On the other hand, some readers in rural areas might be unhappy with the size of their paper for the opposite reason, i.e., because their papers are too thin in content and size. Respondents in this study were asked to indicate the size they would most prefer in an "ideal" paper: Should it be thicker, thinner, or about the same size as the daily they now read? And are such preferences linked with readers' ratings of the paper as a source of important information? The relevant findings are displayed below.

Table 4

Perceptions of Content Imbalances
of Paper Read Most Often
(Version B respondents only)

	Total*	Age		Sex		Education		Reading Frequency		Race	
		Up to 35	35+	Men	Women	College	LT College	Freq.	Infreq.	White	Black
Age orientation: Unequal	41%	46%	38%	43%	40%	47%	37%	40%	42%	40%	50%
Favors younger people	5	6	4	6	4	5	5	4	6	4	12
Favors older people	36	39	34	37	36	42	32	36	36	36	38
Sex orientation: Unequal	19%	26%	14%	23%	16%	24%	16%	17%	22%	17%	31%
Favors men	13	19	9	16	10	17	11	12	16	13	11
Favors women	6	7	5	6	5	7	5	5	6	4	20
Educational orientation: Unequal	36%	44%	30%	39%	33%	52%	26%	33%	42%	35%	40%
Favors better educated	30	37	25	31	29	44	21	28	35	29	36
Favors less well educated	6	7	5	7	4	8	5	5	7	6	4

Q: "Would you say there is more in the paper (you read most often) for men, more for women, or about the same amount for men and women?" (N.B. Respondents were also asked whether there was more in the paper (they read most often) for younger or older people, and for the better- or less well-educated.)

* For each of the three items, the residual proportion comprises readers who felt the newspaper does not favor either of the categories asked about.

A substantial majority of readers are quite satisfied: 73% indicate that their ideal paper would be about the same size as the one they read most often (see table 5). This attitude is shared by readers in all major demographic categories. In addition, readers' overall satisfaction appears to be unrelated to market size or to the thickness of their daily newspaper. People who normally read fairly thick newspapers are as satisfied with their paper's size as those who read thinner papers.

While most readers are satisfied with the size of their paper, a significant minority (27%) nonetheless indicated that they would prefer to change it. Of those who want a change, 56% gave a preference for a thicker paper, and 44% showed a preference for a thinner paper, than the one they now read. And among those dissatisfied, their paper's size is significantly related to their preferences. Those from large metropolitan areas (who tend to read thicker papers) are more likely to indicate that their ideal paper would be reduced in size. Readers from smaller cities and rural areas, (who are normally used to thinner papers) are more likely to want a thicker paper. This pattern is pinpointed when the preferences of dissatisfied readers are correlated with the actual size (number of pages) of the paper they now read.

The size of the daily paper per se has relatively little influence on readers' ratings of the paper as an information source. In table 6.1 & 6.2, readers' ratings of their newspaper's content, as well as ratings of the paper's ability to satisfy their information needs, are correlated with the actual size of their paper. A paper's size can be seen to have relatively little influence on these ratings. Taken as a whole, these findings offer little evidence to suggest that readers'

Table 5

Preference for a Thicker or Thinner Paper

	Want different size	As % of those who wanted change: Want thicker newspaper	Want thinner newspaper
Total readers (Version B)	27%	56%	44%
By age			
18 - 24	29	69	31
25 - 29	31	39	61
30 - 34	32	59	41
35 - 44	32	62	38
45 - 54	22	59	41
55 - 64	25	56	44
65 +	20	35	65
By sex			
Men	28	54	46
Women	27	59	41
By race			
White	27	56	44
Black	31	55	45
By education			
College graduate +	34	44	56
Some college	31	58	42
High school graduate	24	50	50
Less than high school	21	76	24
By income			
$35,000 +	32	41	59
$25 - 35,000	34	53	47
$15 - 25,000	24	67	33
$10 - 15,000	24	50	50
Less than $10,000	25	68	32
By city size			
1 million +	28	36	64
250 -999,999	20	55	45
50 - 249,999	31	90	10
Non-metro area	29	69	31
By reading frequency			
Frequent readers	25	60	40
Infrequent readers	32	50	50
By size of own paper*			
24 pages or less	27	83	17
25 - 40 pages	20	68	32
41 - 60 pages	23	45	55
61 - 80 pages	26	40	60
81 pages or more	30	28	71

* Excluding classified ad pages

Q.: "If you could have a daily newspaper exactly the size that you would like best, would it be thicker, thinner, or about the same thickness as the newspaper you read most often now?"

Table 6.1
Perceived Value of Newspaper Content
on Most Days by Newspaper Size

Size of paper	Content Very important to me
24 pages or less	64%
25-40 pages	68
41-60 pages	71
61-80 pages	78
81 pages or more	72

Table 6.2
Satisfaction with the Daily Newspaper as a
Source of Personally Important Information by
Newspaper Size

Size of paper	Paper has things that matter
24 pages or less	73%
25-40 pages	78
41-60 pages	78
61-80 pages	75
81 pages or more	81

(Version A): "Which of these two statements comes closest to the way you feel?

On most days there are things in the paper that are very important to me, OR
On most days hardly anything in the paper makes much difference to me."

(Version B): "Different people want different kinds of information. Which of these two statements comes closest to the way you feel?

The daily newspaper gives me most of the information I want about the things that matter to me, OR
I have to go elsewhere to get the information I want about the things that really matter to me."

Table 7

Type of Content Want to Be Added
(Version B respondents only)*

	Total*
News coverage (net)	78%
Local news	30
National news	18
International news	15
Better quality coverage	14
Sports news	12
Celebrity news	6
All other news (e.g. more good/happier news)	9
Features (net)	26%
Sales/ads	7
Comics/cartoons	6
Food/menu/recipes	8
All other feature mentions (e.g. trivia questions, art coverage, poetry)	18
All other mentions (e.g. coupon books, more of everything)	7%

* Base consists only of readers who indicated a preference for a thicker paper. Multiple answers were coded.

Table 8

Type of Content Want Reduced or Eliminated
(Version B respondents only)

	Total*
Advertising (net)	60%
Ads (unspecified)	40
Classified	12
Other advertising mentions (e.g. clothing ads; dept. store ads)	11
Sports	19
National/political news	11
All other mentions (e.g., obits, gossip col., editorials, business news)	26

* Base consists of readers who indicated a desire for a thinner paper. Multiple responses were coded.

striking that news and information emerges as the most sought-after general category of content among those who want more from their daily paper.

This is further evidence for the argument that the daily paper (unlike the broadcast media or most magazines) gains reader loyalty primarily by the important and personally relevant information it conveys, which its stable core of readers has come to expect will be delivered on a regular, reliable basis. There is little in these aggregate findings that argues for major changes in content coverage, especially changes that reduce the volume of news and information.

SECTION II

READERS' FEELINGS OF ATTACHMENT TO THE NEWSPAPER

Readers are attracted to the newspaper for reasons that transcend their needs for specific kinds of information. The newspaper is an institution deeply rooted in our society, and reading the paper represents a pastime which, among other things, provides people with entertainment, amusement, and a sense of participation in the great events of the time.

Many readers develop strong feelings of attachment to the newspaper, and to writers, columnists, and reporters whose work they normally follow. These feelings of attachment can represent another significant part of the newspaper's overall appeal. What is the strength of readers' attachment to the newspaper compared to other media such as TV and radio? These questions are important, since a good deal of the the appeal of TV (and radio) is also based upon the relationships that people establish with broadcast personalities (e.g., newscasters, disc jockeys, etc.). This section reports the findings of a series of questions designed to examine readers' feelings of personal attachment to the paper: ratings of their closeness to the newspaper (and other media); ratings of how strongly they rely on the paper; and identification with the writers, columnists, or reporters they regularly follow.

How Close Are Readers to the Newspaper?

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the following they feel closest to: the newspaper they read most often; the television channel they watch most often; or the radio station they

listen to most often. These choices are posed at a fairly general level, and are not fully comparable in view of the differing mix of content and appeals offered by each of the three media. But as expressions of sentiment, they show each of the three media as having stronger or weaker ties among some groups in particular.

Of this sample, 28% feel closest to the newspaper they read most often (see table 9). However, responses of this type (predictably) vary with certain demographic factors. A greater proportion of older than of younger readers say the newspaper is the medium to which they feel closest. Men feel relatively closer to the newspaper than do women. A substantially greater percentage of highly educated, upscale readers also say that the newspaper is the medium to which they feel closest. Not surprisingly, there is a strong relationship between the frequency of newspaper reading and readers' feelings of closeness to the newspaper. More than twice as many frequent as infrequent readers feel closest to the newspaper. In fact, the newspaper outweighs TV in its claim on frequent readers' affections.

The proportions who feel closest to the newspaper must be compared to those who feel closest to the TV channel they watch most often, or those who feel closest to the radio station they listen to most often. Overall, a greater number (40%) indicate that they feel closer to TV than to either of the other media. The sense of closeness to TV as a medium varies inversely with the demographic factors that are linked with closer ties to the newspaper. A substantially greater percentage of young readers indicate that they feel closest to the television channel they watch most often, rather than to the newspaper. Older readers feel somewhat closer to the newspaper, (but more still prefer TV), as do the better educated and the more

Table 9

Which Medium Do They Feel Closest To?

	Newspaper	TV	Newspaper/ TV equally	Radio
Total readers (Version B)*	28%	40%	6%	15%
By age				
18 - 24	11	54	6	23
25 - 29	23	39	1	24
30 - 34	40	34	3	11
35 - 44	33	38	6	13
45 - 54	35	32	7	13
55 - 64	31	42	7	11
65 +	29	38	9	10
By sex				
Men	32	35	6	15
Women	25	44	6	15
By race				
White	29	40	5	15
Black	22	41	19	10
By education				
College graduate +	40	32	5	13
Some college	24	36	6	23
High school graduate	27	42	5	15
Less than high school	25	46	8	9
By income				
$35,000 +	35	36	5	16
$25 - 35,000	32	38	5	17
$15 - 25,000	29	34	7	19
$10 - 15,000	17	52	7	9
Less than $10,000	21	55	13	4
By city size				
1 million +	30	37	8	15
250 - 99,999	36	39	6	10
50 - 249,999	30	37	6	18
Non-metro area	19	47	3	18
By reading frequency				
Frequent readers	36	31	7	13
Infrequent readers	14	58	3	19

* Rows add to less than 100%: certain combined response categories and NAs are not shown.

Q.: "Generally speaking, which do you feel closest to--the newspaper you read most often, the radio station you listen to most often, or the television channel you watch most often?"

affluent. As shown in table 9, radio's appeal can be seen as particularly strong among the young and the more affluent.

How Much Do Readers Rely on the Newspaper?

Anyone with a confirmed habit of daily newspaper reading would probably experience a sense of loss if it suddenly became unavailable. (A few studies done during prolonged strikes have documented this reaction.) Someone who is not so dependent on the paper, however, might be able to adjust more readily, and some might learn to do without it altogether if it remained unavailable. Respondents were asked how they would feel if they were unable to buy any newspapers, and how they would feel if it were impossible to watch TV news, for some time. The results are displayed in Table 10.

Among readers, 33% would feel lost if the newspaper became unavailable, 44% indicate that they might miss it but could adjust, and 23% indicate that they could easily learn to do without the paper. Readers' dependence in this hypothetical sense varied among certain groups. A substantially greater percentage of older than of younger readers would feel lost without the newspaper, as would those living in large metropolitan areas. Not surprisingly, more than twice as many frequent as infrequent readers indicate that they would feel lost without the newspaper. Surprisingly, a smaller percentage of the best educated than of the least educated readers say they would feel lost without the newspaper. Because they use more news media daily, they may be more reluctant to express themselves as dependent on any one. They are also readier than others to give up on TV news.

Readers' assessments of their dependence on the newspaper can be compared with their parallel judgments about TV news. As table 10

Table 10

How Would You Feel If It Were Impossible
To Read a Paper/Watch TV News for Some Time?

	If Newspaper became unavailable			If TV news became unavailable		
	Feel lost	Get used to	Easily do without	Feel lost	Get used to	Easily do without
Total readers (Version B)*	33%	44%	23%	34%	45%	21%
By age						
18 - 24	15	43	42	33	42	25
25 - 29	33	51	17	33	49	19
30 - 34	31	43	26	39	42	19
35 - 44	25	52	23	25	52	24
45 - 54	42	47	10	31	44	23
55 - 64	35	43	22	37	43	17
65 +	53	30	17	47	38	15
By sex						
Men	33	45	23	30	48	22
Women	33	44	23	38	42	20
By race						
White	34	43	23	34	44	22
Black	27	57	16	42	52	6
By income						
$35,000 +	29	47	24	24	43	34
$25 - 35,000	31	53	16	29	49	22
$15 - 25,000	31	49	19	38	45	17
$10 - 15,000	28	47	25	25	57	17
Less than $10,000	32	31	37	55	32	13
By city size						
1 million +	34	45	21	31	48	21
250 - 99,999	36	45	18	34	46	20
50 - 249,999	35	41	24	38	41	21
Non-metro area	26	44	29	38	41	20
By education						
College graduate +	37	47	17	30	41	30
Some college	25	51	24	28	52	20
High school graduate	28	45	27	34	44	22
Less than high school	46	35	20	45	42	12
By reading frequency						
Frequent readers	40	46	13	31	46	22
Infrequent readers	17	40	43	41	41	18

Q.: "Suppose, for some reason, you could not buy any newspapers/it was impossible for you to watch TV news for some time. Which of these comes closest to describing how you would feel about it? Would you say...?
You would feel quite lost without it
You would miss it but could get used to it
You could easily do without it."

* Some row totals add to ± 100% due to rounding, for both "Newspaper" unavailability and "TV news" unavailability.

shows, 34% of them would feel lost if it were impossible to watch TV news, 46% would miss it but could get along without it, and 21% say they could easily do without it. These aggregate sentiments are generally comparable to those shown by readers when confronting the prospect of doing without the daily paper. But differences in reactions exist among certain groups, suggesting that, despite their shared audience, each of the two media has adherents who differ in the intensity of their feelings.

Age affects the strength of one's reliance on TV news: a significantly greater percentage of retired people indicated that they would feel lost without it. Education and income also affect the strength of readers' reliance on TV news. A substantially greater percentage of readers at the low end on both variables say they would feel lost without access to TV news. This is consistent with the pattern (analyzed above) relating to their feelings of closeness to TV in general, and may be attributable to the same reasons. Frequent readers tend to be less dependent on TV news than are infrequent readers, which suggests that one's feelings of anticipated loss may for some groups be complementary (i.e., those who are more oriented to either of the two news media are less upset by the prospect of the unavailability of the other one).

Readers' ratings of reliance on the newspaper and on TV news can be compared to answers given by a comparable sample administered the same questions in an earlier survey, as shown in table 11. People tend to rely more on TV now, and less on the newspaper, than they did twenty or so years ago. A much smaller proportion of 1982 readers indicate that they would feel lost without the newspaper now, compared with the earlier survey done in 1961, while a substantially smaller

Table 11

Changes in Media Attachment: 1982 vs. 1961

	If ... became unavailable:			
	Daily Newspaper		TV News	
	1982	1961	1982	1961
You would feel quite lost without it	33%	49%	34%	28%
You would miss it but could get used to it	44	30	45	36
You could easily do without it	23	21	21	36
	100%	100%	100%	100%

1982 - based on Version B newspaper readers age 18+
1961 - based on total adults age 21+

percentage said they could easily do without TV news. About one person in five apparently can get along without having either of the news sources available to them.

How Strongly do Readers Identify with the Writers and Columnists They Regularly Follow in the Paper?

The personal relationships that readers establish with a newspaper's writers or columnists that they normally follow is a significant factor underlying their reading habits and involvement. Respondents were asked a set of questions designed to assess their feelings of identification with the writers, columnists, or reporters that they regularly read in the paper. They were asked whether they regularly follow a writer or columnist, and if so, whether they had a feeling for what the writer was like as a person, and whether they would want him/her as a friend. The relevant findings are displayed in table 12.

In all, 41% of all readers say they regularly follow a writer/columnist in the paper, and were able to provide that person's name when asked to do so. This percentage is higher among older, better educated, and higher income readers -- all those who have been shown to be more deeply involved with their daily paper. And, as expected, a substantially greater number of frequent readers cited some favorite reporter, writer, or columnist.

Demographic variations in the feelings aroused by specific writers are not patterned, with the exception of those shown by frequent and infrequent readers -- the former show stronger ties than do the latter -- and big-city vs. rural readers.

Table 12

Readers' Identification With Newspaper Writers/Columnists

		As % of those who regularly follow:	
	Regularly follow a writer/columnist	Feel they know personally	Would like as a friend
Total readers (Version B)	41%	72%	76%
By age			
18 - 24	30	65	73
25 - 29	38	82	56
30 - 34	47	71	82
35 - 44	44	73	78
45 - 54	44	73	79
55 - 64	37	64	70
65 +	48	72	84
By sex			
Men	40	69	76
Women	41	74	76
By race			
White	41	74	76
Black	38	51	75
By education			
College graduate +	45	75	74
Some college	44	78	76
High school graduate	39	70	76
Less than high school	36	65	78
By income			
$35,000 +	41	73	74
$25 - 35,000	54	75	76
$15 - 25,000	45	72	73
$10 - 15,000	32	72	83
Less than $10	27	59	80
By city size			
1 million +	41	76	82
250 - 99,999	36	70	77
50 - 249,999	49	74	83
Non-metro area	38	66	61
By reading frequency			
Frequent readers	45	75	79
Infrequent readers	31	63	67

Q.: "Is there a writer, reporter, or columnist whom you read fairly regularly? Do you have a feeling for what he/she is like as a person? Would you say he/she is the kind of person you would like to have as a friend?"

These attachments not only connote stronger newspaper reading habits, they also have consequences for people's feelings about the newspaper (vs. TV) in their daily lives. In every case, readers who regularly follow someone -- who establish a symbolic bond with a writer -- and who feel warmly disposed toward that person are more likely to feel "closest to" newspapers (rather than to TV) than those who haven't formed a bond (see table 13).

The same tilt can be observed in their reactions toward the prospective unavailability of their daily paper. Those with a favorite writer in the newspaper are much less likely to face such a loss with equanimity (see table 14). The parallel findings on people's feelings about having to do without TV news are less clear-cut, but in general, those who haven't formed an attachment to any newspaper writer show a somewhat greater dependence on TV news, and thus seem less happy about facing the prospect of its unavailability.

Table 13
Medium Feel Closest to by Identification with Newspaper Writers/Columnists

	Proportion Saying "Feel Closest To":		
	Newspaper %	TV %	Radio %
Regularly follows a writer/columnist			
Yes	33	33	33
No	25	44	14
Feeling for what/ he/she is like			
Yes	34	32	14
No	31	35	19
Would want to have as a friend			
Yes	37	30	13
No	18	40	26

Q.: (Version B): Generally speaking, which do you feel closest to--the newspaper you read most often, the radio station you listen to most often, or the television channel you listen to most often?

* Rows do not total 100% because of omitted response categories.

Table 14
Attachment to Media by Identification with Newspaper Writers/Columnists

	If Newspaper became unavailable			If TV News became unavailable		
	Feel lost %	Get used to %	Easily do without %	Feel lost %	Get used to %	Easily do without %
Regularly follow a writer/columnist						
Yes	34	48	17	29	44	26
No	31	42	27	38	45	17
Feel for what he/she is like						
Yes	38	46	16	32	43	24
No	27	54	19	22	48	30
Would want to have as a friend						
Yes	39	45	15	29	45	25
No	21	60	19	31	38	31

SECTION III

READERS' RATINGS OF THEIR PAPER'S EDITORIAL POLICY

Newspapers serve as a vehicle for the expression of ideas, commentaries, and opinions on a great many issues that affect the public. The editorial pages typically provide readers with the opportunity to read a variety of opinions on important issues. Readers may agree with their paper's editorial viewpoint, but want editorial opinions to remain separate from the fair, accurate, and balanced treatment of news stories. Readers' feelings about their paper's editorial policy, therefore, can be a significant component of their overall attitudes towards the newspaper. This section reports on a series of questions that were designed to examine readers' ratings of their paper's editorial policy and political views, the degree to which they agree with their paper's views, their feelings about editorial biases in the coverage of the news, and their interest in the editorial section.

How Do Readers Rate Their Paper's Political Views?

As an initial step, all respondents were asked to describe the political orientation of the newspaper they read most often. They were asked whether its views were mostly liberal, mostly conservative, or middle-of-the-road. The same question was asked about their favorite TV news program. The results are shown in table 15.

A somewhat larger proportion of readers adjudge their paper as conservative (24%) than as liberal (16%), but forty percent classify it as middle-of-the-road. Ratings of the paper's political views vary

Table 15

Perceived Political Views of Newspaper and TV News Among Demographic Groups

	Newspaper			TV News		
	Liberal	Conservative	Middle-of-the-road	Liberal	Conservative	Middle-of-the-road
Total readers*	16%	24%	40%	26%	19%	34%
By age						
18 - 24	14	23	43	23	23	37
25 - 29	17	26	43	35	21	26
30 - 34	15	28	43	28	25	31
35 - 44	17	24	38	25	17	35
45 - 54	17	24	40	28	19	29
55 - 64	16	23	38	22	16	42
65 +	14	23	36	21	14	32
By sex						
Men	17	26	43	28	20	33
Women	14	23	38	24	18	34
By race						
White	15	25	40	24	19	35
Black	25	21	36	38	22	23
By education						
College graduate	18	34	36	24	22	35
1-3 years college	18	26	42	32	19	36
High school graduate	15	22	41	26	18	35
Less than high school	13	19	38	19	19	28
By household income						
$35,000 & over	22	23	43	30	21	39
$25,000 - 35,000	16	26	44	28	22	34
$15,000 - 25,000	14	27	43	29	18	31
$10,000 - 15,000	14	28	35	27	17	31
Less than $10,000	12	20	37	17	18	36
By city size						
1 million +	22	22	38	31	20	29
250 - 999,999	11	23	45	22	16	38
50 - 249,999	14	31	35	17	26	36
Non-metro areas	11	24	42	25	16	37
By reading frequency						
Frequent readers	17	26	42	27	18	35
Infrequent readers	14	21	36	22	22	30

Q.: "How would you describe the political views of the newspaper you read most often--would you say that it is mostly liberal, conservative, or middle-of-the-road?"

"How about the TV news program you watch most often--would you say it is liberal, conservative, or middle-of-the-road?"

* Rows do not total 100%: "no answer" and "don't know" categories are not shown.

little with demographic factors. A greater percentage of readers of large metropolitan area papers rate them as liberal, compared with readers in rural areas. And a greater proportion of blacks (25%) than whites (15%) rate their paper as liberal. Other variations in reader perceptions are small and unpatterned.

For purposes of comparison, readers were also asked to rate the political views of the TV news program they watch most often. A somewhat greater percentage rated their TV newscast as liberal (26%) than as conservative (19%); one-third of the sample (34%) rated it as middle-of-the-road. Demographic factors play the same minor role in people's ratings of the political leanings of their favorite TV news program as of their newspaper. A substantially larger proportion of blacks (38%) than of whites (24%) rate their favorite TV news show as liberal. Highly-educated, high-income readers, and especially those living in large metropolitan areas are all more likely to rate their TV news show as liberal. These results provide aggregate measures of both of the news media. Ratings in individual markets would offer more pointed indicators of readers' images of the political leanings of the two major news media to which they are attuned most closely.

Do Readers Agree with Their Paper's Editorial Views?

Whether or not readers agree with their newspaper's editorial (i.e., political) viewpoint is another aspect of their overall feelings about their paper's editorial quality. Obviously, someone who generally agrees with his paper's views is likely to have a more favorable opinion of the paper than someone who only agrees with them infrequently. In fact, whether or not readers agree with a given paper's views can be a significant factor affecting its readership,

since if they have a choice, readers tend to select a paper whose editorial opinions are more congenial with their own.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether in general they agree or disagree with the editorial viewpoint of the paper they read most often. As shown in table 16, a majority of readers tend to agree with the editorial views of the newspaper they read most often: 15% generally agree with their newspaper's editorial viewpoint and, 47% sometimes agree. At the other end of the spectrum, 12% frequently disagree, and 3% almost always disagree.

The percentage who generally agree with their paper is somewhat higher among older readers, as well as those who are well-educated or earn more income. Not surprisingly, frequent readers indicate generally higher level of agreement with their newspaper's editorial opinions. But few divergences among groups emerge from this detailed analysis, suggesting that not much intensity of feeling is reflected in readers' assessments of this key element of a paper's editorial image.

Is the Paper's Editorial Section Varied in Its Content?

For many readers, the variety of voices found on the editorial pages of their paper forms a significant part of its overall appeal. Those who feel that the paper offers a wide range of opinions are likely to have a more positive attitude toward its editorial policy than those who feel that it is slanted toward only one viewpoint. Respondents were asked to indicate whether the paper's columns and signed articles, located on or close to the editorial pages, represented a wide range of opinions, or whether they were slanted towards one viewpoint.

Table 16
Extent of Agreement with the Newspaper's Editorial Viewpoint

	Generally agree	Sometimes agree	Agree/ disagree almost equally	Frequently disagree	Almost always disagree
Total readers*	15%	47%	9%	12%	3%
By age					
18 - 24	10	46	7	11	1
25 - 29	14	46	7	11	2
30 - 34	17	46	8	13	4
35 - 44	17	44	11	13	4
45 - 54	18	50	9	14	2
55 - 64	14	51	9	15	3
65 +	17	44	11	13	2
By sex					
Men	15	47	9	15	3
Women	16	47	8	11	2
By race					
White	16	46	8	13	3
Black	13	51	14	18	1
By education					
College graduate	18	48	8	12	4
1-3 years college	10	52	8	15	3
High school graduate	17	46	9	11	2
Less than high school	17	42	9	13	1
By household income					
$35,000 & over	14	51	8	12	3
$25,000 - 35,000	15	52	9	13	2
$15,000 - 25,000	20	48	7	12	2
$10,000 - 15,000	13	46	9	13	3
Less than $10,000	13	38	10	15	2
By reading frequency					
Frequent readers	17	49	8	13	3
Infrequent readers	12	41	10	11	2

Q.: "Summing everything up, would you say you generally agree with the editorial viewpoint of the paper you read most often, sometimes agree, frequently disagree, or almost always disagree?"

* Rows do not total 100% because of omitted response categories.

As shown in table 17, two-thirds of all readers (67%) feel that their paper's columns and signed articles reflect a wide range of opinions, and 25% say it represents just one viewpoint. Older readers are slightly more likely than younger ones to feel that the paper's editorial section offers a wide range of opinions. Blacks are appreciably more likely to feel that their paper's editorial pages are limited in presenting divergent viewpoints. Readers in large metropolitan areas are slightly more likely than those in smaller towns to feel that their paper offers a variety of opinions. But in general, for readers of all types, their paper appears to be hospitable to or to seek out a variety of opinions on issues of the day.

How Unbiased is the Paper's Coverage of the News?

Most readers feel that a paper's own editorial views should remain separate from its news coverage. Those who believe that their paper's coverage of the news is not influenced by its editorial opinions are likely to have a more positive attitude toward the paper than those who believe that the paper's news coverage is slanted. Respondents were asked specifically whether they felt that their paper's editorial opinions were kept separate from its news coverage, or whether their paper's editorial opinions affect its news coverage.

Over twice as many readers (43% vs. 16%) feel that their paper keeps news and editorial opinions separated as feel its news coverage is affected by its editorial slant. Another 16% finds some evidence of editorial slant in the news, at least some of the time or on some topics. Thus, in all, one-third of all readers see some signs of editorial influence on basic news decisions. (See table 18).

Table 17

Perceived Variety in Newspaper's Editorial Section

	Wide range of opinions	Just one viewpoint
Total readers (Version A)*	67%	25%
By age		
18 - 24	63	31
25 - 29	65	27
30 - 34	71	24
35 - 44	68	24
45 - 54	63	23
55 - 64	70	23
65 +	71	23
By sex		
Men	67	26
Women	67	24
By race		
White	68	24
Black	59	34
By education		
College graduate	66	27
1-3 years college	67	26
High school graduate	67	24
Less than high school	70	22
By household income		
$35,000 & over	67	27
$25,000 - 35,000	68	24
$15,000 - 25,000	67	24
$10,000 - 15,000	63	28
Less than $10,000	73	23
By city size		
1 million +	71	23
250 - 999,999	62	26
50 - 249,999	70	21
Non-metro area	64	30
By reading frequency		
Frequent readers	69	26
Infrequent readers	64	24

Q.: "How about regular columns and other signed articles on or close to the editorial page? Do you think they represent a wide range of opinions, or do they mostly reflect just one viewpoint?"

* Rows do not total 100%: "don't knows" and no answers are not shown.

Table 18

Perceived Editorial Effects on News Coverage

	Editorial opinions separate from news coverage	Editorial opinions affect news coverage	Mixed opinion: sometimes does/doesn't	Can't say
Total readers (Version A)	43%	16%	16%	25%
By age				
18 - 24	38	16	11	35
25 - 29	45	17	18	20
30 - 34	55	16	17	12
35 - 44	43	22	13	22
45 - 54	42	14	22	21
55 - 64	40	15	21	24
65 +	41	12	16	31
By sex				
Men	46	18	19	18
Women	40	15	15	31
By race				
White	43	16	17	25
Black	47	20	12	22
By education				
College graduate	48	29	13	10
1-3 years college	48	16	18	18
High school graduate	42	17	16	26
Less than high school	36	5	17	42
By household income				
$35,000 & over	49	25	13	14
$25,000 - 35,000	48	17	18	17
$15,000 - 25,000	48	15	13	24
$10,000 - 15,000	47	12	18	22
Less than $10,000	31	11	14	45
By city size				
1 million +	42	11	18	28
250 - 999,999	39	16	21	25
50 - 249,999	39	15	22	25
Non-metro area	47	20	10	22
By reading frequency				
Frequent readers	47	16	17	21
Infrequent readers	34	15	16	35

Q.: "In your judgement, does that newspaper keep its editorial opinions separate from its news coverage--that is, the news stories they choose and the way they write about them--or do their editorial opinions affect their news coverage?"

The better educated and those with higher incomes are more likely both to see news and opinion kept separated and also to see effects of the latter on the former. But most often, the differences between groups simply reflect variations in the expression of any clear opinions on the issue. These results reflect a fairly skeptical attitude rather than one either of affirmation or of cynicism on the part of readers when asked whether their paper keeps its news coverage separated from its editorial opinions.

How Involved Are Readers with the Editorial Section of Their Paper?

Respondents were asked two questions designed to provide information about their involvement with their paper's editorial section: (1) how often they actually read the editorials their paper prints, and (2) whether they had ever written a letter to the editor. A majority of newspaper readers (78%) read the editorials in their paper at least some of the time. As shown in table 19, only 22% of all readers indicate that they "almost never look at" the editorials, 43% sometimes glance at them, and 35% try to read them on a regular basis. More than twice as many older readers indicate that they read the editorials on a regular basis. Highly educated readers are also significantly more likely to read them regularly, as are whites. Readership of editorials is strongly related to frequency of reading of a daily paper in general. Involvement in these two senses are really aspects of the same habitual use of and reliance on the daily paper.

Writing letters to the editor can be seen as one of the clearest indicators of an intense involvement with issues presented in the news or editorial columns of the daily paper. As might be expected, only a

Table 19

Frequency of Reading Editorials

	Almost never look at	Sometimes glance at	Read on a regular basis
Total readers (Version A)	22%	43%	35%
By age			
18 - 24	39	40	21
25 - 29	22	46	33
30 - 34	22	54	23
35 - 44	19	51	31
45 - 54	12	41	47
55 - 64	15	39	46
65 +	18	38	44
By sex			
Men	22	43	35
Women	22	43	34
By race			
White	22	42	36
Black	21	55	24
By education			
College graduate	15	38	46
1-3 years college	20	45	35
High school graduate	21	45	34
Less than high school	32	43	25
By household income			
$35,000 & over	21	47	32
$25,000 - 35,000,	15	50	34
$15,000 - 25,000	16	42	42
$10,000 - 15,000	26	44	29
Less than $10,000	28	42	30
on-metro area			
By reading frequency			
Frequent readers	16	43	41
Infrequent readers	36	45	19

Q.: "Let's talk about the editorials on the editorial page of the newspaper you read most often. Would you say that you almost never look at them, that you sometimes glance at them, or that you try to read them on a regular basis?"

small minority of readers (13%) have ever written a letter. The low incidence of letter-writing by readers in general can be better gauged by the fact that only 2% wrote one in the three months prior to the interview. But even among this minority, certain groups stand out as more active: the middle-aged, white readers, the better-educated, and those with higher incomes (see table 20). These are, as we have seen, groups that are more likely to read editorials regularly, making their letter-writing a visible aspect of the continuing dialogue between the paper and its most active segment of readers.

The reading of a paper's editorials is linked with certain other attitudes held by readers toward their paper. For example, those who regularly read editorials are in a better position than others to make a judgment about the separation of news and editorial opinion. As shown in table 21, those who read editorials regularly are, on balance, somewhat more skeptical about how high the wall stands that is meant to keep the two separated. For, while almost half (48%) feel the two are kept separate by their paper, two in five (41%) gave answers reflecting a belief that some influence of editorial opinions on news coverage is exerted at least some of the time. As might be expected, those who almost never read editorials -- the least involved group of readers -- are most often inclined (52%) to hold no opinion on the issue of their newspaper's editorial bias.

Finally, there is an affinity between the regular reading of editorials and readers' general level of agreement with their paper's editorial viewpoint. As shown in table 22, those who are regular readers of editorials are significantly more likely to find themselves in substantial agreement with their paper's views than are others less often exposed to editorial opinions. The converse is also true:

those who are in general agreement are more likely to be regular readers. The two go hand in hand: both are indicators of closeness to or involvement with the daily paper, expressed in attitudinal or behavioral terms.

Table 20
Writing a Letter to the Editor

	Written a letter: Ever	Within past 3 months	Have not written letter
Total readers (Version A)	**13%**	**2%**	**87%**
By age			
18 - 24	9	2	91
25 - 29	15	3	85
30 - 34	11	3	89
35 - 44	22	2	79
45 - 54	15	2	85
55 - 64	9	-	91
65 +	9	1	91
By sex			
Men	14	1	86
Women	12	3	88
By race			
White	14	2	86
Black	8	4	92
By education			
College graduate	29	3	71
1-3 years college	14	4	86
High school graduate	11	1	88
Less than high school	2	1	98
By household income			
$35,000 & over	19	1	81
$25,000 - 35,000	20	3	80
$15,000 - 25,000	9	2	90
$10,000 - 15,000	8	-	92
Less than $10,000	8	-	92
By reading frequency			
Frequent readers	14	2	85
Infrequent readers	10	2	90

Q.: "Have you, yourself, ever written a letter to the editor of a paper? (If yes): Have you written a letter to the editor of a paper within the past three months?"

Table 21

Perceived Bias in News Coverage by Frequency of Reading Editorials

	Proportion of readers who feel:			
	Editorial separate from news coverage	Editorial affects news coverage	Mixed opinion: sometimes does/doesn't	Can't say
Almost never look at editorials	25%	10	13	52
Sometimes glance at editorials	48%	16	14	22
Read editorials on regular basis	48%	20	21	11

Q.: "In your judgement, does that newspaper keep its editorial opinions separate from its news coverage--that is, the news stories they choose and they way they write about them---or do their editorial opinions affect their news coverage?"

Q.: "Let's talk about the editorials on the editorial page of the newspaper you read most often. Would you say that you almost never look at them, that you sometimes glance at them, or that you try to read them on a regular basis?"

Table 12

Extent of Agreement With Newspaper's Editorial Viewpoint
By Frequency of Reading Editorials

	Proportion of readers who:*		
	Sometimes/generally Agree	Frequently/almost always disagree	Can't say
Almost never look at editorials	30%	4	50
Sometimes glance at editorials	66%	16	11
Read editorials on a regular basis	71%	17	2

Q.: "Summing everything up, would you say you generally agree with its editorial viewpoint, sometimes agree, frequently disagree, or almost always disagree?"

Q.: "Let's talk about the editorials on the editorial page of the newspaper you read most often. Would you say that you almost never look at them, that you sometimes glance at them, or that you try to read them on a regular basis?"

* Rows do not total 100% because of omitted response categories.

SECTION IV

DIMENSIONS OF NEWSPAPER PERFORMANCE

How good a job does the newspaper do in meeting its readers' needs? A newspaper's overall performance can be broken down into a number of dimensions: how well it covers the news, how easy it is to understand, the value it gives for its money, etc. Readers were asked to rate their paper's coverage of various topics that figure prominently as news categories in most newspapers, to assess nine key dimensions of their newspaper's performance, to rate their current paper's quality in either of two comparative contexts and to rate the power of the press relative to other institutions.

How Well Does the Newspaper Cover the News?

The desire to keep abreast of news and current events is a powerful motivation for newspaper reading. Readers' assessments of how well their paper covers the news, therefore, are central to their attitudes toward other aspects of its performance. Using a scale from 1 (very good) to 4 (not good at all), respondents were asked to evaluate the job their newspaper does in helping to keep them informed about each of a number of topics. Relatively few readers give their paper low marks for any of the topics evaluated. As shown in table 23 readers give the highest marks to coverage of sports events, crimes and robberies, and inflation. At the opposite end, coverage of the drug problem, health issues, neighborhood news, and pollution problems is assessed more unfavorably, although coverage of each gets "good" grades from a majority of readers.

Table 23

Readers' Evaluations of Newspaper's Coverage of Various News Topics
(in percentages)

	Proportion rating coverage as: Very good	Not too good/ Not good at all	Mean*
Sports events, news	49%	4%	1.6
Crimes and robberies	45	12	1.7
Inflation/rising cost of living	41	13	1.8
Unemployment	36	16	1.9
What's going on in other countries	31	17	1.9
What local government is doing	30	14	1.9
What President Reagan is doing	26	13	1.9
Young people using drugs	25	30	2.2
Personal health topics	19	18	2.1
Things that happen in the neighborhood	18	36	2.3
Pollution problems	15	32	2.3

Base: Version A respondents. "Don't know/no answer" excluded from bases in each row; those answering "fairly good" are not shown.

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* Scores ranged from 1=very good to 4=not good at all.

Q.: "Please tell me--for each of the topics I read to you--how good a job the newspaper you read most often does in helping to keep you informed. Would you say the job done by that newspaper is very good, fairly good, not too good, or not good at all in helping to keep you informed about (Read topics)?"

Black readers rate their paper's news coverage more highly than white readers do, except for coverage of sports news (see table 24). Perhaps because of their broader interests and greater information needs, highly educated readers typically tend to be more critical of their paper's coverage of various news topics, e.g., news about sports, international news, the drug problem, and local neighborhood news. Readers living in large metropolitan areas generally rate their paper's news coverage more favorably than do readers living in rural areas. Finally, frequent readers tend to rate their paper's coverage of topics (other than sports) highly more often than infrequent readers do. This finding is somewhat at variance with the generally more critical attitudes of the highly educated segment of readers from which they are more likely to come. But when the mean ratings on all topics are compared, differences between the two groups are insignificant. This suggests that evaluations of the quality of topical coverage are not powerful determinants of differences in reading frequency -- among those who buy and read a newspaper at least once in a while.

Readers' Ratings of Key Aspects of Their Newspaper's Performance

The paper's appearance, its readability, and the value it offers for the money all contribute to its overall image. Respondents rated a set of nine key dimensions of their newspaper's performance on a scale ranging from "1" (extremely poor) to "9" (excellent). Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that a majority of readers have a positive image of their newspaper's performance. Nearly four out of five (78%) give their paper's comprehensibility (i.e., how hard it is to understand) a rating of "7" or higher. At the other end, only 48%

Table 24

Proportion of Readers Who Feel Their Paper Does a "Very Good" Job of Covering News Topics

	Sports events	Crimes & robberies	Inflation	Unemployment	Int'l events	Local govt. news	Presidential actions	Youth using drugs	Health topics	Neighborhood news	Pollution problems
Total (Version A)	49%	45%	41%	36%	31%	30%	26%	25%	19%	18%	15%
By age											
Under 35	49	45	39	34	29	27	22	23	16	18	11
35 and older	49	45	42	37	32	31	29	27	22	19	17
By reading frequency											
Frequent reader	48	47	43	38	33	30	28	26	23	19	16
Infrequent reader	51	41	34	29	25	27	21	23	11	18	10
By education											
College graduate +	35	39	36	28	19	34	22	19	16	17	14
Some college	52	46	45	36	32	29	28	15	21	13	9
High school graduate	55	50	44	42	37	30	27	33	21	19	18
Less than high school	45	39	32	31	28	26	24	30	19	26	16
By residence size											
1 million +	58	48	47	39	39	29	31	30	25	17	15
250-999,000	46	46	39	38	30	33	27	26	18	22	15
50-249,000	36	27	27	23	18	24	20	20	14	19	15
Non-metro area	46	48	40	36	28	31	22	22	15	17	13
By sex											
Men	47	41	39	35	29	31	28	22	15	16	14
Women	45	48	42	36	33	28	25	29	23	21	15
By race											
White	47	44	38	34	28	28	24	24	19	18	14
Black	28	57	57	47	54	40	43	40	28	23	21

Question: "Please tell me--for each of the topics I read to you--how good a job the newspaper you read most often does in helping to keep you informed. Would you say the job done by that newspaper is very good, fairly good, not too good, or not good at all in helping to keep you informed about (Read topic)?"

of the readers rate their paper's fairness or impartiality "7" or higher. Substantial majorities of readers rated their paper as high on all other aspects of performance (see table 25).

In line with results reported above, highly educated readers emerge as more critical on these dimensions of newspaper performance. With the exception of the newspaper's readability, they rate their paper less favorably on all these performance measures (see table 26). Readers living in the largest metropolitan areas are generally more inclined to rate their newspaper favorably than are residents of smaller urban or rural areas. Finally, and as shown in other findings, frequent readers rate their paper's performance more highly than do infrequent readers on these key dimensions.

How Do Readers Rate Their Current Paper in a Comparative Context?

Respondents were asked whether they had ever read a different newspaper than the one they read currently, and if so, they were asked to compare the two. If they had not changed their paper, they were asked whether their current paper had changed in its quality relative to the way it was five years ago. Just under half (46%) of all readers had read some other newspaper: Twenty-seven percent had switched within the past five years (prior to the survey) and 19% had done so at some earlier point (see table 27). Those who have been more mobile in their lives and careers -- white people over age 25, the better educated, the most affluent -- are more likely to have had experience reading other papers.

Table 25

Readers' Evaluations of Selected Aspects of Their Newspaper's Performance

	Proportion giving score:* High: 7 or above	Low: 3 or below	Mean Score
How hard it is to read/understand	78%	5%	7.4
How good it looks	69	4	7.1
Quality of people working for it	70	2	7.0
Value it gives readers for the money	70	5	7.0
How good in bringing to light things public ought to know about	69	5	7.0
How interestingly it is written	65	4	6.9
How accurately it presents the news	65	4	6.8
How genuinely interested in this community	60	12	6.5
How fair or impartial to all sides	48	9	6.1

Base: Total readers. "Don't know/no answer" excluded from base in each row. Items were rotated in order of presentation.

*Scores ranged from 1=extremely poor to 9=excellent

Q.: "Here's something a little bit different. I'd like you to rate the daily paper you read most often, using this scale. As you see, it goes from one to nine, with "1" at the bottom or extremely poor end, and "9" at the top or excellent end of the scale. How would you rate that newspaper in terms of...?"

Table 26

Proportion of Readers Reporting a High Score ("7" or More) on Selected Aspects of Newspaper Performance

	How hard read/undrst.	How good it looks	Quality employees	Value for money	Reports what public should know	How intrst. written	How accurate presents news	How intrsted in community	How fair/ impartial
Total Readers*	78%	69%	70%	70%	69%	65%	65%	60%	48%
By age									
Under 35	77	66	66	69	69	61	67	56	45
35 and older	80	71	72	70	68	69	64	62	49
By reading frequency									
Frequent reader	81	71	72	71	69	68	68	61	49
Infrequent reader	73	64	65	67	68	59	59	58	46
By education									
College graduate	80	63	65	67	58	55	58	58	38
Some college	75	68	68	66	67	63	66	51	42
High school graduate	79	73	71	71	72	69	66	61	51
Less than high school	80	69	74	73	72	69	69	68	57
By residence size									
1 million +	79	69	72	76	73	73	67	58	51
250-999,000	80	70	71	65	68	61	62	64	46
50-249,000	77	69	66	64	65	60	65	65	44
Non-metro area	77	68	67	69	64	58	65	57	45

* Those who responded "don't know/no answer" are excluded from the base for each item (column)

Question: "Here's something a little bit different. I'd like you to rate the daily paper you read most often, using this scale. As you see, it goes from one to nine, with "1" at the bottom or extremely poor, and "9" at the top or excellent at the end of the scale. How would you rate that newspaper in terms of ...?"

Table 27

Changes in Newspaper Read Most Often

	Read another paper	If yes: How long ago:* Less than 5 years	5 years or more
Total readers	46%	27%	19%
By age			
18 - 24	34	30	4
25 - 29	45	33	11
30 - 34	52	35	17
35 - 44	53	29	24
45 - 54	48	23	25
55 - 64	47	18	28
65 +	46	19	27
By sex			
Men	49	30	19
Women	44	24	20
By race			
White	48	27	21
Black	29	25	4
By education			
College graduate	62	33	28
1-3 years college	50	33	17
High school graduate	43	24	19
Less than high school	36	20	16
By household income			
$35,000 & over	54	28	25
$25,000 - 35,000	47	28	18
$15,000 - 25,000	44	28	16
$10,000 - 15,000	45	25	20
Less than $10,000	46	27	19
By city size			
1 million +	40	24	15
250 - 999,999	48	25	22
50 - 249,999	52	36	16
Non-metro area	51	26	24
By reading frequency			
Frequent readers	46	26	21
Infrequent readers	43	28	14

Q.: "Was there ever a time when you regularly read some other daily newspaper, perhaps one from another town or city?" (If yes) How long ago was that?

* Totals may differ due to rounding.

Of these changers, 41% feel that their current paper is better than the one they had read previously, 38% feel that it is about the same, and 21% feel that it is worse than the one they read previously. Those who have been shown to be consistently more critical of their paper's performance -- highly educated readers in particular -- tend to rate their current paper more unfavorably than others do (see table 28).

Analogous results emerge in the comparisons of the majority (54%) of readers who have not changed their regular paper. As shown in table 29, 41% of these readers feel that their regular newspaper is better than it was five years ago, 55% feel that it is about the same, and 4% feel that it has gotten worse. In other words, an overwhelming majority of readers feel that the quality of the newspaper they now read regularly has either stayed the same or improved in recent years. Very few readers feel that their paper has gotten worse over the same period. And, most current readers of a paper different than one read earlier rate its quality as better than or as good as the latter. There is little evidence in these twin assessments of any perceptible decline in editorial quality, in the eyes of newspaper readers.

How Much Power Does the Newspaper Have to Affect People's Lives?

Because the newspaper serves as a vehicle for the expression of ideas, commentary, and opinions on issues affecting the public (as well as news about them), the press is often thought to wield considerable power. This presumed power lies in its ability to shape public opinion and public policy on issues affecting the well-being of the people. Therefore, the power of the press, or more specifically,

Table 28

Current Paper Compared to
Paper Read Earlier

	Much better	Somewhat better	(Net) better	About the same	Worse	Much worse	(Net) Worse
Total changers	24%	17%	41%	38%	16%	5%	21%
By age							
18 - 24	23	17	40	34	18	9	27
25 - 29	16	19	35	39	16	10	26
30 - 34	27	18	45	32	17	5	22
35 - 44	22	16	38	32	19	7	26
45 - 54	27	14	41	44	12	2	14
55 - 64	27	21	48	31	16	5	21
65 +	24	17	41	47	10	1	11
By sex							
Men	24	17	41	34	17	7	24
Women	23	18	41	40	14	4	18
By race							
White	24	16	40	37	16	6	22
Black	20	28	48	32	18	2	20
By education							
College graduate	25	18	43	28	20	8	28
1-3 years college	18	16	34	35	20	10	30
High school graduate	21	17	38	46	13	3	16
Less than high school	27	19	56	35	9	1	10
By household income							
$35,000 & over	23	18	41	33	21	4	25
$25,000 - 35,000	23	14	37	39	17	7	24
$15,000 - 25,000	27	18	45	34	15	6	21
$10,000 - 15,000	22	20	42	46	7	1	8
Less than $10,000	28	15	43	36	15	7	22
By city size							
1 million +	28	17	45	35	14	3	17
250 - 999,999	23	16	39	38	17	5	22
50 - 249,999	19	17	36	39	18	7	25
Non-metro area	21	18	39	38	15	8	23
By reading frequency							
Frequent readers	24	18	42	37	15	5	20
Infrequent readers	21	16	37	38	17	6	23

Q.: "Compared with that other paper, would you say the newspaper you now read most often is much better, somewhat better, about the same, worse, or much worse?"

Table 29

Current Paper Now Compared to Five Years Ago

	Much better	Somewhat better	(Net) better	About the same	Worse	Much worse	(Net) Worse
Total nonchangers	14%	27%	41%	55%	4%	1%	4%
By age							
18 - 24	13	31	44	52	3	1	4
25 - 29	13	31	44	54	1	1	2
30 - 34	12	23	35	64	1	-	1
35 - 44	14	24	38	58	5	-	5
45 - 54	13	31	44	51	5	-	5
55 - 64	15	26	41	54	4	1	5
65 +	15	22	37	53	9	2	11
By sex							
Men	12	32	44	52	3	1	4
Women	15	22	37	57	5	1	6
By race							
White	14	27	41	54	4	1	4
Black	11	26	37	59	4	-	4
By education							
College graduate	12	24	36	60	3	1	4
1-3 years college	13	28	41	54	6	-	6
High school graduate	16	26	42	53	4	1	5
Less than high school	12	27	39	58	3	1	4
By household income							
$35,000 & over	11	32	43	50	7	-	7
$25,000 - 35,000	14	32	46	50	3	1	4
$15,000 - 25,000	14	22	36	59	3	1	4
$10,000 - 15,000	14	26	40	58	2	-	2
Less than $10,000	13	26	39	57	3	1	4
By city size							
1 million +	15	22	37	59	3	1	4
250 - 999,999	17	32	49	45	6	-	6
50 - 249,999	7	35	42	52	3	4	7
Non-metro area	12	28	40	55	5	-	5
By reading frequency							
Frequent readers	14	28	42	53	4	1	5
Infrequent readers	13	23	36	59	5	0	5

Q.: "I'd like you to compare the daily paper you now now read most often with that same paper five years ago. Would you say it now is ...?"

* "Don't know/no answer" responses were excluded from each row's base.

the power of a person's own newspaper to affect his/her well-being can represent another significant dimension of its overall standing or image. Yet, how much power does the press appear to have in the public's eyes, rather than those of its agents or critics?

Respondents in this survey were asked to indicate how much power they felt their newspaper (as well as other institutions) has in affecting the well-being of the people living in their localities. As shown in table 30, very few readers perceive their newspaper as having a "great deal of power" in affecting their daily lives. Among the nine institutions rated in this study, the newspaper is ranked seventh in terms of the percentage of readers (21%) who feel that it has a great deal of power to shape their lives. Readers are more likely to rate government at all levels (federal, state, city), organized labor, major corporations, and local banks/financial institutions as more powerful than their local daily newspapers. The perceived power of the local newspaper to affect the well-being of the people is about the same as the perceived power of TV stations, and of churches or organized religions. Readers are most likely to feel that the newspaper has some power over people's general state of well-being.

Table 31 reveals that older readers, those who are or were married, or who are highest or lowest in income adjudge the newspaper as relatively more powerful in its effects on people's lives. In addition, readers who reside in rural areas are least likely to feel that the newspaper has a great deal of power, compared with readers living in urbanized areas. And, consistent with other findings, frequent readers are more likely to perceive their paper as more powerful than do infrequent readers. Generally similar patterns can

be observed in the evaluations of local TV stations among these demographic groups. In summary, the power of the press, measured in terms of its direct impact on people's lives, is not seen as at all comparable to that of the institutions and agencies of government.

Table 30

Readers' Evaluations of the Power of Nine Institutions
(in percentages)

Power of:	Proportion who say:* A great deal	Some	Hardly any, none
Federal government	68%	26	3
State government	55%	38	4
City government	44%	45	9
Major U.S. corporations	43%	35	17
Organized labor/unions	43%	33	19
Local banks, financial institutions	41%	44	12
Local daily newspapers	21%	53	24
Local churches/ organized religion	19%	50	27
Local television stations	18%	51	27

* Base: Version B readgrs

"Don't know/no answer" responses are not shown.

Q: "Here is a list of several kinds of organizations or groups. Please tell me how much power you think each one has to affect the lives of the people living in (respondent's city). Would you say that...has a great deal, some, hardly any, or no power to affect the well-being of the people?"

Table 31

Readers' Evaluations of the Power of the Local Newspaper and Local TV Station

	Local Newspaper Power:			Local TV Station Power:		
	Great deal	Some	Hardly any/none	Great deal	Some	Hardly any/none
Total readers (Versión B)*	21%	53%	24%	18%	51%	27%
By age						
18 - 24	15	52	32	15	46	34
25 - 29	10	48	40	12	43	42
30 - 34	16	54	30	8	60	31
35 - 44	17	58	23	17	54	25
45 - 54	28	53	17	20	52	25
55 - 64	23	57	18	17	57	21
65 +	37	46	11	31	48	13
By sex						
Men	23	48	28	15	51	30
Women	19	57	21	20	51	24
By Marital Status						
Married	22	53	23	18	49	27
Div/Wid/Sep	24	52	20	21	55	16
Never Married	15	52	33	13	52	36
By household income						
$35,000 & over	22	57	20	19	56	21
$25,000 - 35,000	21	52	26	12	59	29
$15,000 - 25,000	15	52	29	18	49	29
$10,000 - 15,000	20	51	27	19	48	28
Less than $10,000	26	50	19	23	40	28
By education						
College graduate	21	56	25	21	43	25
1-3 years college	19	49	27	20	46	27
High school graduate	18	56	28	13	46	27
Less than high school	29	48	25	21	42	25
By reading frequency						
Frequent readers	24	52	22	18	43	25
Infrequent readers	14	55	28	17	48	30
By Region						
Northeast	20	58	22	19	52	25
North Central	23	50	26	18	51	28
South	17	56	22	16	52	24
West	26	47	26	19	46	33
By Residence Size						
1 million +	22	60	18	20	45	25
250-999,000	25	47	25	17	47	29
50-249,000	21	56	20	21	44	16
Non-Metro area	16	46	35	13	43	34

* "Don't know/no answer" responses are not shown

APPENDIX

Most of the questions in the survey that dealt with images and performance of the daily paper were administered to approximately half of all newspaper readers, using either of two versions (A or B) of the basic questionnaire. These responses were subsequently weighted separately and projected to the total readers of newspapers in the general adult population.

The number of persons interviewed using each of these questionnaires is shown in these appendix tables. Also shown are the total weighted readers of daily newspapers for all of the demographic variables used in this report. All reported percentages are based on weighted respondents.

Further details on sampling, weighting, and tabulation of survey data are provided in The Daily Newspaper: Readership and Content, a technical report on the entire study prepared by Audits & Surveys, Inc., and available from the Research Department of NAB.

Table A-1

Bases for Sampled Adults - Versions A & B - Unweighted

Group	Version A	Version B
Total Newspaper Readers	931	872
Age:		
18 - 24	111	127
25 - 29	110	86
30 - 34	106	102
35 - 44	167	164
45 - 54	122	127
55 - 64	132	126
65 +	175	135
Education:		
Not HS Graduate	193	182
HS Graduate	362	345
Some College	199	184
College Graduate +	169	154
Income:		
Under $10,000	126	119
$10,000-$14,999	109	102
$15,000-$24,999	196	179
$25,000-$34,999	177	163
$35,000 +	152	139
Sex:		
Male	435	402
Female	496	470
Race:		
White	832	783
Black	77	74
Region:		
Northeast	224	211
North Central	261	245
South	283	267
West	163	149
Residence Size:		
1 million +	352	350
250 - 99,999	195	179
50 - 249,999	135	127
Non-metro area	249	216
Reading Frequency:		
Frequent Reader (4-5 days)	666	609
Infrequent Reader	265	263
Marital Status:		
Married	682	611
Divorced/widowed/separated	119	134
Single (never married)	126	126
Years at Location:		
5 or more	755	713
4 or less	173	158

Table A-2

Bases for Sampled Adults - Versions A & B - Weighted (in 000's)

Group	Version A	Version B
Total Newspaper Readers	145,682	148,596
Age:		
18 - 24	24,836	25,680
25 - 29	18,840	17,370
30 - 34	15,708	16,196
35 - 44	24,544	25,226
45 - 54	19,049	20,481
55 - 64	16,860	20,809
65 +	25,005	21,944
Education:		
Not HS Graduate	29,877	20,152
HS Graduate	55,972	58,769
Some College	33,363	32,865
College Graduate +	25,174	25,524
Income:		
Under $10,000	22,734	23,141
$10,000-$14,999	17,647	17,802
$15,000-$24,999	30,144	30,719
$25,000-$34,999	26,602	28,021
$35,000 +	22,910	21,905
Sex:		
Male	68,660	68,426
Female	77,022	80,170
Race:		
White	127,742	132,594
Black	14,343	13,023
Region:		
Northeast	33,861	33,754
North Central	38,364	38,770
South	46,928	49,188
West	26,529	26,884
Residence Size:		
1 million +	54,616	59,016
250 - 99,999	30,521	29,911
50 - 249,999	20,821	20,251
Non-metro area	39,724	39,418
Reading Frequency:		
Frequent Reader (4-5 days)	102,899	100,274
Infrequent Reader	42,783	48,322
Marital Status:		
Married	92,533	94,094
Divorced/widowed/separated	23,866	27,106
Single (never married)	28,364	27,221
Years at Location:		
5 or more	114,867	117,863
4 or less	30,217	30,602